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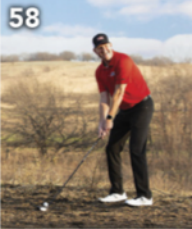
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A PLACE FOR US ALL FRISCO'S DIVERSE CULTURE
EMBRACING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES DAUGHTERS OF FAITH
CHANGE ON THE RANGE CITY LEADERS CELEBRATE PGA OF AMERICA

CONTENTS



CULTURE

- 20 Daughters of Faith
By Amy Day Richmond
- 24 Treat Yourself
By Rachel Beard
- 33 How Does Loving Yourself Translate to Loving Others?
By Leadership Prep School Students

PEOPLE

- 16 Scene & Be Seen
- 28 Concrete Canvas
By Christine Perrenot
- 62 Leading a Transformation
By Christine Perrenot

FOOD

- 52 Spice It Up!
By Christine Perrenot
- 56 Recipe: Healthy Valentine's Day Truffles
- 57 Small Bites

COMMUNITY

- 18 Things to Do
- 58 Change on the Range
By Stephen Hunt
- 67 Wild at Heart
By Lisa Ferguson
- 70 Did You Know

QUICK LOOKS

- 13 From the Publisher
By Chris Johnson
- 14 Letters to the Editor
- 71 Comic
By Cal Slayton
- 72 One Day in Frisco
By Gabriela Gilstrap

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BY AMY DAY RICHMOND

A group of Frisco women, the Daughters of Faith, meet monthly to share their beliefs from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu points of view.



Daughters of Faith

Anyone who has lived in Frisco for more than 10 years will agree that the Frisco of 2008 looked very different than the Frisco of today—in more ways than one. Frisco's growth has happened at warp speed, and many of us are still trying to catch our breath.

With growth comes a plethora of choices, boundless opportunities and glorious conveniences, but, sometimes, there are growing pains... such as fear.

When Saba Ilyas moved here from the melting pot of Chicago in 2007 and enrolled her children in Rogers Elementary School, she says it was "predominantly white" and "a little scary." She felt like they were the only Muslims in Frisco, so much so that she laughingly admits to following the first other Muslim she saw in Frisco—to see where they worshipped and where they bought their meat.

"Usually, people are just afraid of the unknown," says Sheikh Mubeen Kamani, a youth director and scholar at The Islamic Center of Frisco. "When my daughter was a year old, she used to be afraid of grass. I had to actually expose her to what grass was, and then she was fine. So, a lot of times, that is how people are with Muslims, because they have never sat down and talked to a Muslim."

And, truth be told, misconceptions about all religions run rampant throughout society. So, one evening, in the fall of 2017, a small group of women tentatively sat down to begin the monthly process of openly sharing their respective beliefs, from a Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu point of view, and aptly called themselves "Daughters of Faith."

"They were pretty careful about who they invited in," says Robin Johnson of Preston Trail Community Church. "Just because we did not want people coming in with an agenda to convert other people. It is not a proselytizing organization. It is just a community of women of faith."

Denise Basden of Preston Trail Community Church explains, "The reason why we decided to start with a closed group was primarily because we

really did not know where this was going to go, but we did want a safe environment to be able to have discussions and learn from each other. The blessing of all this is that you gain a better understanding of where somebody else is coming from and can appreciate the things we have in common."

Rabbi Heidi Coretz of Shur Tikvah Frisco adds, "We always speak personally. We do not represent all of the people or beliefs of our religious background, but how my faith informs

THE DAUGHTERS OF FAITH HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT OTHER BELIEFS, DISPELLED NUMEROUS MISCONCEPTIONS AND HAVE BEEN PLEASANTLY SURPRISED AS THEY HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

my belief on a subject. So, we have talked about women's roles within our religious space, marriage and family, gratitude... Each woman is invited, as she wishes, to share her perspective on how that subject speaks to her as a Jew, Muslim, Christian or Hindu. We have visited each other's places of worship, and we have celebrated holidays together. We just learn so much more from each other than we would by reading a book or attending an event. It is just a much deeper way of learning through a meaningful relationship."

Laxmi Tummala of the Karva Siddhi Hanuman Temple says, "I feel like I can say anything on my mind, and I know I will not be judged. That is one thing I really love about this group... aside from the fact that they are just a hilarious group of women. They are so much fun to be around!"

"No one ever wants to leave," Ms. Ilyas laughs. "We start at 7 or 7:30, and by 9:30, we are all saying, 'Oh gosh! We have got to go home!' That is usually how it goes."

Ms. Basden agrees, saying, "It has been just a delightful experience. You know, for all the bad news in the world, there is so much good people do not ever

hear about. So, it makes me happy to be part of a group that probably raises eyebrows when we are out in public and hugging and kissing each other on the cheeks and showing how much we care for each other. I like being that kind of example, and people seeing there are great relationships here."

Ms. Johnson says, "The biggest thing for me was I learned we have so much in common. Instead of seeing each other as a label, we see each other as human beings."

In addition, the group has learned countless things about each other's faiths, dispelled numerous misconceptions and they have been pleasantly surprised along the way.

Sadaf Haq of The Islamic Center of Frisco laughs, "The Christmas [meeting] we had at Preston Trail was amazing because all of us Muslim women knew the Christmas songs!" And Ms. Basden says she was surprised to learn that "what we celebrate at Christmas has really nothing to do with the Christmas tree. It has a lot of symbolism, but there is nothing in the Bible that suggests we should have a Christmas tree in our home."

Uncovering another surprise while traveling, Ms. Coretz became curious as to how Muslims would handle Ramadan and Ifar in Iceland, since it does not get dark there. She then discovered Judaism and Islam were similar in using the time zones of Jerusalem and Mecca, respectively, to guide the timing of their celebrations.

Ms. Tummala shares that many religions have the concept of trinity and a spiritual leader who helps spread the message of God, that other faiths believe in a life after death and that the basic thing every religion tries to teach is to be good. "These are some of the things I did not fully understand before I got into interfaith."

And when Pittsburgh Jews in prayer were brutally massacred, the group immediately leapt into action to show their support by hosting an interfaith service the next day and attending

Shabbat worship the following Friday night. Ms. Coretz says, "That is just a beautiful example to me of the opportunities that are going to come out of a beautiful friendship... not just between the women in our group, but between our various houses of worship."

Because of these positive results, the Daughters of Faith members believe interfaith is a critically important element for the future of Frisco. "I think because so many people of different religions are coming to North Texas, we are just going to have little silos of people if we do not have some kind of connection with each other," Ms. Johnson says.

"The only way to get over [fear of other religions] is to get to know somebody on a personal level. Take religion out of it for a minute," Ms. Tummala says. "When you already understand the person, it is much easier to discuss different religious aspects... and any preconceptions, barriers or prejudices can be broken down to really just facts."

Ms. Tummala recommends starting a group that is large enough to encompass various religions, but small enough to maintain intimacy and allow for deeper relationships. Finding people who are open, non-judgmental and who want to learn is also important to ensure everyone maintains mutual respect. Or, if a formal interfaith group is too time consuming, consider visiting other places of worship. "The more we know about each other, the quicker barriers come down," Ms. Tummala reiterates.

Ms. Basden concludes, "For all the planning that has gone into this city to create this amazing environment, it is only really and truly as good as the relationships of the people within the community."

Any Day Richmond is a writer who relishes faith, family, intriguing conversations and inspiring words. She wishes time could be saved in a bottle, because one lifetime isn't enough.

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